

AN ANALYSIS OF THE L1 INTERFERENCE ERRORS OF TURKISH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN THEIR WRITTEN PRODUCTIONS

TÜRK ÜNİVERSİTE ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN YAZILARINDA ANADİL AKTARIM HATALARININ İNCELENMESİ

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Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümünde okuyan öğrencilerin anadil aktarım hatalarını incelemektir. Öğrencilerin hatalarını anadil aktarımı açısından incelemek için, öğrencilerin yazılarında en fazla zorluk çektiği alanlar Hata Analizi ve Karşılaştırmalı Analiz yöntemlerinin yardımıyla incelenmiş ve sınıflandırılmıştır. Bu bağlamda 54 hazırlık sınıfı öğrencisinin (36 kız ve 18 erkek) 120 kompozisyon kâğıdı incelenmiş ve bulunan hatalar dil gelişim hataları ve dil aktarım hataları olmak üzere iki kategoriye ayrılmıştır. Analiz sonunda toplam 746 hata bulunmuştur. Bu hatalardan 448 tanesi dil gelişim hataları ve 298 tanesi ise dil aktarım hataları olarak belirlenmiştir. Dil gelişim hataları incelenmemiş, sadece dil aktarım hataları incelenmiştir. Türkçeden kaynaklanan dil aktarım hataları ilk önce kendi içinde morfolojik, leksik, sentaktik ve ortografik olmak üzere 4 ana kategoriye ve daha sonra alt kategorilere ayrılmıştır. Elde edilen sonuçlara göre, kelime çeviri hataları, sayılamayan isimlerin yanlış kullanımı ve fiil hatalarını kapsayan leksik kategori, öğrencilerin yazılarındaki hataların en fazla olduğu kategori olmuştur. Geriye kalan dil aktarım hataları sırasıyla en fazla sentaktik, morfolojik ve ortografik kategorilerinde tespit edilmiştir.

Sonuç olarak bu çalışma araştırmacılara, yabancı dil öğretmenlerine ve müfredat düzenleyenlere dil öğretim süreçlerini kolaylaştırmada onlara yardımcı olacak bazı öneriler sunmakta ve ayrıca bu çalışma yabancı dil öğrencilerinin kendi dil aktarım hatalarının farkına varmalarına yardımcı olmaktadır

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hata, Yanlış, Hata Analizi, Karışım, Dil Transferi

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the interference errors of the students studying at the Department of English Language and Literature. To investigate learners' errors in terms of mother tongue interference, the most problematic areas in the writings of the students are classified and discussed with the help of Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis. In this context 120 composition sheets of 54 prep-class students (36 females and 18 males) were analyzed and the errors were firstly categorized as developmental errors and interference errors. A total of 746 errors were identified at the end of the analysis. 448 errors of these identified errors were regarded as developmental errors and the other 298 errors were interference errors. Developmental errors were disregarded, only interference errors were analyzed. These errors stemming from

Turkish were initially categorized into four major categories; morphological, lexical, syntactic and orthographic and then those mentioned major categories were also divided into sub-categories. According to the results, the lexical category-including word for word translation errors, wrong use of uncountable nouns and verb errors- constitutes the largest group among the interference errors in the writing productions of students. The other interference errors were located in syntactic, morphological, and orthographic categories respectively.

Consequently, this study aims to propose suggestions to the researchers, foreign language teachers, and curriculum organizers which may help them to facilitate language teaching process, and also foreign language learners may become aware of their interference errors with the help of this study

Key Words: Error, Mistake, Error Analysis, Interference, Language Transfer

INTRODUCTION

Every learning in human life is a process. In every process, human beings make mistakes, misjudgments, and errors; especially, while learning a novel attitude. (Akarsu, 2004, p.1).

Despite the resources spared for the learning of English -a lingua franca- in Turkey, satisfaction levels in learners' writing for communication are nowhere near the expected. When considering the concrete outputs of language learning -the learners' errors- it is clearly seen that the efficiency of language teaching is inadequate. One probable reason of this inefficiency can be the typological differences between English and Turkish. It is quite possible that a Turkish learner of English may commit numerous errors due to the fact that English and Turkish typologically have many different features like article system, usage of prepositions, word order, spelling, etc. Accordingly, most of the errors committed by Turkish university students are due to the interference of Turkish (Han, 2009; Elkılıç, 2012, Erdoğan, 2005)

A lot of studies (Krashen, 1988; Trask, 1999; Ellis, 2008) inevitably reveal that not all wrong productions of learners are of the same kind; therefore a distinction has been made between a mistake and an error in the literature of language teaching and learning. Mistakes, generally regarded as inconsistent deviations, can appear even in one's first language and thus can be self-corrected. Therefore, mistakes of this nature do not usually get research attention for the right reasons. These inconsistent deviations may result from different factors such as carelessness, fatigue, negligence, or some other aspects of performance. However, errors are quite different from mistakes in that they result from incomplete knowledge of the language being learnt or used. So they are less amenable to self correction, especially in the absence of feedback from an authority (Richards and Schmidt, 2010).

The Role of Mother Tongue in Foreign Language Learning

Using students' mother tongue in foreign language classroom has been discussed for many years, and the common view dominating the foreign language teaching is that teachers should use target language and avoid using the mother tongue. Teaching an additional language through translation had been widespread until 19th century and the use of L1 in teaching L2 was almost universal because language teaching placed an emphasis on written form not on spoken form. But at the beginning of 20th century, this view slowly lost its appeal and reversed itself towards a monolingual approach due to the emphasis on the spoken world (Miles, 2004).

Numerous studies (Sharma, 2006; Tang, 2002; Cook, 2001; Butzkam, 2003) have been conducted which either support or reject the use of L1 in EFL classroom. In their paper on using L1 in EFL classrooms, Jadallah and Hasan (2011) note that the general assumption which

has prevailed for some time is that English ought to be learnt through English, and not by the inclusion of L1, which has to be prohibited in the classroom. However, the assumptions against using L1 in EFL classroom haven't got sufficient evidence for avoiding L1 (Macaro, 2001; Morahan, 2010), and also rigidly eliminating or limiting the native language doesn't appear to guarantee better learning.

Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis

Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) depends on behaviorist and structural theories according to which learners' errors are the results of transfer from L1. The main purpose of CAH is to predict the possible errors of learners by systematically comparing the first and the second languages. Lightboun (2005) claims that the reasoning behind the theory is simple: when learning an additional language, a learner tends to use L1 structures in L2 production, and where structures of L1 differ from the L2, errors will be made. And he also maintains that it will be enough to identify the differences and similarities between various languages in order to deal with the problems of teaching those languages.

Error Analysis

Error is likewise unique to humans and the learners' errors are a register of their current perspective on the Target Language" (James, 1998:1-7).

Error Analysis has developed to have insights into the learning process of second/foreign language. It provides "invaluable source of information" (Corder, 1982:32) about students' errors to the researchers or teachers. And it can also help them to understand the nature of the students' errors, and to redesign their teaching techniques, methods, or teaching materials.

Among linguists, there are generally two types of sources of errors; (I) interference errors, and (II) intralingual errors. Interference errors occur when the learner uses a rule of his/her L1 while speaking or writing in L2. On the other hand, intralingual errors occur because of the influence of one target language item or rule on another, in other words; "intralingual errors result from faulty or partial learning of the target language rather than language transfer" (Erdoğan, 2005:266).

METHODOLOGY

Participants of the Study

54 (36 females and 18 males) preparatory class students, ranging in age from 18 to 28, were the participants of this study from the Department of English Language and Literature. The students are at pre-intermediate level. These students were preferred because only these students have courses related to grammar and language skills.

Data Collection and Procedure

The source of the data for this study was 120 compositions written on different topics by 54 prep-class students. Each of these compositions was between 150-250 words. The examined papers were both the compositions written in the proficiency exam before the beginning of the education year and those written as assignments in class hours.

FINDINGS

At the end of the analysis a total of 746 errors were identified. 448 errors of these identified errors were developmental errors and 298 errors were interference errors. The developmental errors were not investigated, only the interference errors were taken into consideration.

Table 1- Error Type and Number of Errors

Error Type	Number of Errors
General Errors	448
Interference Errors	
• Morphological Category	
▪ Tense errors	30
▪ Errors lack of subject-verb agreement	21
▪ Other Morphological errors	11
• Lexical Category	
▪ Word for word translation	48
▪ Wrong use of uncountable nouns	16
▪ Verb errors	37
• Syntactic Category	
▪ Article errors	31
▪ Preposition errors	43
▪ Errors in word order	20
• Orthographic Category	
▪ Capitalization errors	20
▪ Punctuation errors	15
Total	746

DISCUSSION

Morphological Category

Tense Errors

In Turkish language there are three main times as; past, present and future, but on the other hand English has a lot of variations of times. It is interesting that despite of the differences between English and Turkish in tenses, this sub-category includes one of the lowest numbers of errors among the linguistic categories. Yüksel (2007) points out two possible reasons for the minority of tense errors as; “the students did not use various types of tenses in their writings because of the topics related to their writings. And also there are some certain rules about the usage of tenses, and you do not make so many mistakes once you learn these rules” (p.54). Some of the examples of tense errors are indicated as below.

Table 2- Tense Errors

<i>The students <u>are not understanding</u>...</i>	<i>(The students don't understand...)</i>
<i>My friend <u>is</u> in Bingol for years.</i>	<i>(My friend has been...)</i>
<i>I <u>waited</u> for her nearly four hours when she came.</i>	<i>(I had waited...)</i>

Errors Lack of Subject-Verb Agreement

The agreement between subject and verb is another problematic area for Turkish EFL students. In Turkish, ‘there’ can be used with a singular auxiliary verb followed by a plural noun, but the situation is not the same in English. As Elkılıç (2012) emphasizes, “In English if the following noun is plural, plural auxiliary verb is used, if the noun is singular, singular auxiliary verb is used”. And also he maintains that “numbers representing plurals can be used

before singular nouns in Turkish" (p.661). So the samples below can be regarded as interference errors.

Table 3- Errors Lack of Subject-Verb Agreement

<i>There are a lot of <u>student</u> in the cafeteria.</i>	<i>(There are a lot of students...)</i>
<i>There <u>is</u> many books which can help you.</i>	<i>(There are many books...)</i>
<i>I have to pass two <u>exam</u> before coming to the university.</i>	<i>(I have to pass two exams...)</i>

Other Morphological Errors

Turkish learners of English commit some errors while using determiners and demonstratives due to the typological differences between English and Turkish. In Turkish it is possible to say this city, that city, *this cities* or *that cities*, as there are no plural demonstrative adjective. For example, the phrase "birçok şehir" is a correct phrase in Turkish, but when the learner directly translates this structure to the target language, the result will be incorrect "a lot of city".

Table 4- Other Morphological Errors

<i>I like a lot of <u>city</u> in Turkey.</i>	<i>(I like a lot of cities...)</i>
<i><u>This</u> cars are the fastest cars in the world.</i>	<i>(These cars are...)</i>
<i>My team doesn't play <u>like</u> I want.</i>	<i>(...as I want.)</i>
<i>There should be <u>other</u> teacher in the exam.</i>	<i>(There should be another teacher...)</i>

Lexical Category

Word for Word Translation Errors

While writing or speaking in the target language, foreign language learners tend to rely on their native language structures to produce a response (Bhela, 1999). In parallel with this assumption, Turkish EFL students commit a lot of errors due to the direct translation. This sub-category comprises the highest ranking of interference errors.

Table 5- Word for Word Translation Errors

<i>I think he will be <u>useful</u> to his family...</i>	<i>(I think he will be beneficial to his family...)</i>
<i><u>According to</u> me...</i>	<i>(For me...)</i>
<i>I <u>stole</u> the door and entered</i>	<i>(I knocked the door...)</i>
<i>Most of students <u>won</u> the exam.</i>	<i>(Most of the students passed...)</i>
<i>I am <u>reading</u> at Bingol University</i>	<i>(I am a student at Bingol University)</i>

Wrong Use of Uncountable Nouns

As it is known, most uncountable nouns in English are countable in Turkish and therefore Turkish EFL learners confuse them. Information, food, and news are uncountable in English; however they are countable in Turkish like most of the words such as rubbish, sugar, homework etc. (Elkılıç, 2012:32)

Table 6- Wrong Use of Uncountable Nouns

<i>She gave me some <u>informations</u> about exam</i>	<i>(She gave me some information...)</i>
<i>I like local <u>foods</u> of Bingol.</i>	<i>(I like local food...)</i>
<i>The news about the accident <u>were</u> horrible.</i>	<i>(The news about the accident was...)</i>

Verb Errors

Turkish EFL students generally have difficulty in using the verb 'be', as "there is no independent verb 'be' in Turkish" (Şimşek, 1989, cited in Han 2009:52). Furthermore, there is

only one verb that means 'olmak' in Turkish whereas English has three different verbs; become, be and occur that have the same meaning but different usages. So the Turkish EFL students may not differentiate the differences between them.

Table 7- Verb Errors

<i>Everybody must <u>become</u> careful.</i>	<i>(Everybody must be...)</i>
<i>But <u>I not</u> English speak...</i>	<i>(But I can't speak...)</i>
<i>Every day a lot of accidents <u>become</u>.</i>	<i>(... a lot of accidents occur...)</i>

Syntactic Category

Article errors

Articles have always been a problem for Turkish EFL students because in Turkish there is no definite article, and use of the indefinite article is different from its use in English. For example, in Turkish there is no need to use a definite article 'the' while asking such a question 'How was the weather?' In Turkish the sentence is formed as 'hava nasıldı?' in which there is no equivalent of the article 'the'. In Turkish before a countable singular noun it is not necessary to use indefinite article "a/an", but in English it is compulsory.

Table 8- Article Errors

<i>The teapot fell on <u>the</u> me</i>	<i>(The teapot fell on me...)</i>
<i>How was <u>...</u>weather?</i>	<i>(How was the weather?)</i>

Preposition Errors

It can be very difficult to use the right prepositions for foreign language learners of English. For instance, we travel **on** a bus, but **in** a car. We read the news **in** the paper and hear about it **on** the radio. The birthday party happened **at** 11:45 **on** Tuesday **in** January.

Additionally Elkılıç (2012) emphasizes that prepositions aren't used as separate grammatical items in Turkish, "however they are added to the endings of the nouns to show accusative, dative or genitive form" (p.659). Therefore, the Turkish learners of English commit a good number of errors related to the different usages of prepositions between English and Turkish.

Table 9- Preposition Errors

<i>I apologized <u>from</u> him.</i>	<i>(I apologized to him.)</i>
<i>My brother is superior <u>than</u> me.</i>	<i>(My brother is superior to me.)</i>
<i>I was in Bingol <u>in</u> holiday</i>	<i>(I was in Bingol on holiday.)</i>

Errors in Word Order

This study also revealed that Turkish learners of English didn't commit a good number of word order errors stemming from Turkish. This may be due to the emphasis on the word order differences between Turkish and English in Turkish Education System. This notion is supported by Ellis (1994) that "Syntax is slightly less affected by transfer than other areas because metalinguistic factors can have a negative influence" (p.663).

Table 10- Errors in Word Order

<i>That event saw my mother.</i>	<i>(My mother saw that event.)</i>
<i>I had yellow a bike when I was seven.</i>	<i>(I had a yellow bike when I was seven.)</i>
<i>We decided to a restaurant open in Turkey.</i>	<i>(We decided to open a restaurant in Turkey)</i>

Orthographic Category**Capitalization Errors**

While writing in English, Turkish EFL students commit some capitalization errors due to L1 habits. Most of the capitalization errors can be regarded as general errors but there are also some stemming from the influence of Turkish.

Table 11- Capitalization Errors

<i><u>In</u> summer...</i>	<i>(In summer...)</i>
<i>DEPARTMENT OF <u>ENGLISH</u> LANGUAGE AND <u>LITERATURE</u>.</i>	<i>(DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE)</i>

Punctuation Errors

In the compositions of Turkish EFL students, numerous punctuation errors have been identified. But, like capitalization errors, most of these punctuation errors are general errors, there are only a few errors that can be regarded as interference errors.

Table 12- Punctuation Errors

<i>I get up at 07.30 every morning and go to school at 8.15 o'clock.</i>	<i>(I get up at 07:30 every morning and go to school at 8:15 o'clock.)</i>
<i>If we study hard we can learn English...</i>	<i>(If we study hard, we can learn English)</i>

CONCLUSION

The present study revealed that while writing in English, Turkish EFL learners commit a good number of interference errors and intralingual/developmental errors. As it is mentioned before, when writing or speaking the target language, foreign language learners tend to rely on their native language structures to produce a response and if the structures of the two languages are distinctly different, then one could expect a relatively high frequency of errors to occur in L2, thus indicating an interference of L1 on L2 (Bhela, 1999). This study also clearly shows that Turkish learners of English heavily rely on the structures of Turkish; therefore they commit numerous interference errors while writing in English.

Consequently, teachers should regard learners' errors as inevitable outputs of language teaching process, by doing this they can design their teaching materials in the light of these errors, and also they can conduct remedial teaching. In this respect, teachers should be tolerant to learners' errors in their assignments and exams, as it is common sense that if the learner does not worry about committing errors, he/she will use the structures of target language more frequently. Teachers should also emphasize the structural and cultural differences between English and Turkish in order to reduce the learners' interference errors.

There is the hope that this study helps EFL teachers and educators to become familiar with Turkish EFL learners' most frequent errors that can be traced back to the interference of Turkish. In addition, it also helps them to make more objective decisions about how to adopt appropriate teaching strategies to help EFL students learn better.

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